



THE UNIVERSITY *of* EDINBURGH

## Edinburgh Research Explorer

### **Review: Newell Ann Van Auken. The Commentarial Transformation of the Spring and Autumn (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2016).**

#### **Citation for published version:**

Gentz, J 2018, 'Review: Newell Ann Van Auken. The Commentarial Transformation of the Spring and Autumn (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2016).', *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, vol. 81, no. 3, pp. 561-563. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0041977X18001209>

#### **Digital Object Identifier (DOI):**

[10.1017/S0041977X18001209](https://doi.org/10.1017/S0041977X18001209)

#### **Link:**

[Link to publication record in Edinburgh Research Explorer](#)

#### **Document Version:**

Peer reviewed version

#### **Published In:**

Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies

#### **Publisher Rights Statement:**

This article has been published in a revised form in Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0041977X18001209>. This version is free to view and download for private research and study only. Not for re-distribution, re-sale or use in derivative works. © SOAS, University of London 2018 .

#### **General rights**

Copyright for the publications made accessible via the Edinburgh Research Explorer is retained by the author(s) and / or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing these publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

#### **Take down policy**

The University of Edinburgh has made every reasonable effort to ensure that Edinburgh Research Explorer content complies with UK legislation. If you believe that the public display of this file breaches copyright please contact [openaccess@ed.ac.uk](mailto:openaccess@ed.ac.uk) providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.



NEWELL ANN VAN AUKEN:

*The Commentarial Transformation of the Spring and Autumn.*

(SUNY Series in Chinese Philosophy and Culture.) xiv, 338 pp. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2016. £xx. ISBN 978 1 438 46299 8.

After Schaberg (2001) and Pines' (2002) monumental studies on the *Zuo zhuan* and the three volumes translation by Durrant, Li and Schaberg (2016), Newell Van Auken has delighted the sinological readership with yet another book on the *Zuo zhuan*. We know that the *Zuo zhuan* consists of different parts. Since Du Yu has pointed this out in the third century AD this has been further systematised and discussed by numerous scholars. And yet, nobody has hitherto provided a detailed analysis of the short and quite technical exegetical passages that relate directly to the *Chunqiu* text and which Van Auken calls "Direct Commentary Passages". She has now devoted more than 300 pages to this task and surprises the reader with entirely new insights that must fully convince any reader of the relevance of her enterprise.

After an introduction into some basic systematic questions, a brief reception history and a short explanation of the *Zuo* Tradition, the author draws an argumentative line through seven chapters in which she first familiarises the reader with a number of subtle details of the *Zuo zhuan* exegesis to then proceed to her own interpretations and historical explanations of the text.

In chapter one Van Auken presents a detailed systematic description of the different parts of the *Zuo* commentary starting with early analytical categories of historical commentaries and ending with an own formal description of the Direct Commentary Passages which form the object of the book's analysis. And although I would disagree with some of the translations (*li* 禮 as "precedents" on pp. 22 and 23 or *fan* 凡 as "any" on p. 38) the chapter is the sharpest and most detailed introduction to the different commentarial parts of the *Zuo zhuan* that I have ever read.

Providing numerous examples from different kinds of *Chunqiu* records, chapter two argues convincingly how the *Zuo zhuan* interpretation of *Chunqiu* reporting (I would prefer to interpret *gao* 告 as "ritual announcement") and recording is based on the implicit assumption that the *Chunqiu* was written from the perspective of Lu and is thus Lu-centred.

Chapter three investigates how according to the *Zuo* commentary the *Chunqiu* expressed praise or blame in its hierarchies of naming and ranking. Van Auken concludes that according to *Zuo zhuan* "the purpose of the records was not to evaluate events, but simply to register judgements already made and reported" (82). These judgements were "neither subtle nor concealed but on full display" (87).

Chapter four moves away from the discussion of how the *Zuo zhuan* understands the text of the *Chunqiu* and provides Van Auken's own interpretations of the sources of the Direct Commentary Passages in the *Zuo zhuan*. Through meticulous textual analysis and rigorous questions Van Auken reconstructs two main sources that she thinks formed the basis of the specific and the general remarks respectively in these Passages, sources of early *Chunqiu* exegetical material different in character and organisation (topological clusters following the chronological order of the records vs topical sets of multiple records illustrating each general remark) but sharing certain core assumptions (such as Confucius not being the editor of the *Chunqiu* etc.). The discussion would have gained a further dimension if the early exegetical *Chunqiu fanlu* chapters in which we see very similar

arrangements of *Chunqiu*-exegetical material would have been taken into a comparative consideration.

Chapter five looks at the passages ascribed to the Gentleman and to Confucius and points out that in contrast to the Direct Commentaries which mainly focus on rules and prescriptions these passages do make judgements of the moral quality of historical actions and concludes that these passages must be products of later editing.

Chapter six compares the Direct Commentaries of the *Zuo zhuan* to the *Gongyang* and *Guliang* traditions. Emphasising fundamental differences especially in the exegetical approach of moral evaluations Van Auken concludes that the Direct Commentaries did not take *Gongyang* or *Guliang* as models and that there was also no borrowing in the other direction since the Direct Commentaries address a different group of *Chunqiu* records and overlapping explanations are in most cases entirely unrelated. The chapter is convincing but should have taken into account that like the *Zuo zhuan* both *Gongyang* and *Guliang* commentaries are composed of different parts of which some are focused on ritual prescriptions and others on moral judgements, very similar to the differences that Van Auken also finds in different parts of the *Zuo zhuan*. Van Auken is also not entirely correct when she claims that *Gongyang* and *Guliang* do not contain passages that remark on groups of related records (172).

Chapter seven is the grand finale of the book in which Van Auken develops all the evidence gained from her previous chapters to form an argument towards a possible history of the *Chunqiu* exegetical traditions which she reconstructs quite virtuosically as a gradual process. To bridge the early stage of the Direct Commentary Passages to the *Gongyang* and *Guliang* commentaries she constructs a hypothetical intermediary stage.

In an Epilogue this is further discussed in the light of the two main exegetical personalities Zhou Gong and Confucius who embody different exegetical approaches and historical stages in the interpretation of the *Chunqiu* records.

The book concludes with an appendix including a topological list of all Direct Commentary Passages, presented as summaries, and then listed according to event types. Notes, bibliography and an index conclude the book.

The book is written in an elegant and precise style. The only point that is almost strikingly odd is the strong repetitiveness in her presentations of her main hypotheses. Van Auken sometimes almost writes in circles by repeating the same point times and again from different angles. Central hypotheses read at least ten times can thus not be missed. And rightly so, with this monograph Van Auken has presented highly differentiated and original research providing a veritable flood of new perspectives on the early *Chunqiu*-exegetical traditions, she has set new rigorous analytical standards in the academic discussion which have to be met and taken into account in any future research on the *Zuo zhuan*.

Joachim Gentz (University of Edinburgh)